

What is claimed is:

1. A method of determining the status of an article on which work is being performed comprising the steps of:
  - (1) electronically transferring data on the status of an article to a computer database;
  - (2) searching the computer database to locate the article; and
  - (3) identifying data on the status of the article.
2. The method of claim 1, wherein the article is a vehicle undergoing repair.
3. The method of claim 2, wherein step (4) comprises electronically transferring the identified data to a remote location.
4. The method of claim 3 further comprising electronically requesting the status of the vehicle prior to step (2).
5. The method of claim 4, wherein steps (2) and (3) are performed on a computer network.
6. The method of claim 5, wherein the computer database of step (1) is maintained on a global computer communications network.
7. The method of claim 2, wherein step (1) comprises entering the status data on the vehicle status into a data transfer device and transferring the status data from the data transfer device to the computer database.

8. The method of claim 7, wherein the device is portable.

9. The method of claim 2, wherein the computer database stores an identifier for the vehicle and step (2) comprises searching for the identifier of the vehicle.

10. The method of claim 9, wherein the identifier is a repair order number, a Vehicle Identification Number, or a bar code.

11. The method of claim 1, wherein the status data includes information selected from the group consisting of: (i) cost estimate completed, (ii) repair authorized by owner, (iii) insurance approved, (iv) parts ordered, (v) parts received, (vi) vehicle scheduled for repair, (vii) vehicle disassembled, (viii) supplemental damage report written, (ix) repair of supplemental damage approved by insurance, (x) additional parts ordered, (xi) vehicle set up on repair equipment, (xii) structure and body repaired, (xiii) panels installed, (xiv) corrosion protection applied, (xv) metal work completed, (xvi) vehicle primed for painting, (xvii) vehicle painted, (xviii) vehicle cleaned, (xix) vehicle refinished, and (xx) repair completed.

12. The method of claim 11, wherein the vehicle undergoes repair steps which result in the status data of claim 11.

13. The method of claim 12, wherein said repair steps are performed in the order of the information of (i)-(xx) of claim 11.

14. The method of claim 12, wherein the status of the vehicle is provided to the owner of the vehicle following at least one of repair steps (v), (x), (xv), and (xx).

15. The method of claim 14, wherein the status of the vehicle is automatically provided to the owner of the vehicle.

16. A method of tracking the repair process of a vehicle that is in a repair shop comprising the steps of:

- (1) periodically electronically transferring data on the status of a plurality of vehicles undergoing repair to a database on a computer;
- (2) determining the length of time that the status data for each vehicle remains unchanged via software on the computer; and
- (3) identifying a vehicle for which the status data is unchanged beyond a predetermined length of time and identifying the unchanged status data.

17. The method of claim 16, wherein the status data of step (1) is transferred daily.

18. The method of claim 16, wherein the status data of step (1) is selected from the group consisting of: (i) cost estimate completed, (ii) repair authorized by owner, (iii) insurance approved, (iv) parts ordered, (v) parts received, (vi) vehicle scheduled for repair, (vii) vehicle disassembled, (viii) supplemental damage report written, (ix) repair of supplemental damage approved by insurance, (x) additional parts ordered, (xi) vehicle set up on repair equipment, (xii) structure and body repaired, (xiii) panels installed, (xiv) corrosion protection applied, (xv) metal work completed, (xvi) vehicle primed for painting, (xvii) vehicle painted, (xviii) vehicle cleaned, (xix) vehicle refinished, and (xx) repair completed.

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19. The method of claim 16, wherein step (1) comprises entering the status data into a data transfer device and transferring the data from the data transfer device to a computer.

20. The method of claim 16, wherein the database stores an identifier for each vehicle, the identifier being selected from the group consisting of vehicle make, vehicle model and vehicle year such that the software determines the extent that the status data for each identifier remains unchanged beyond a predetermined length of time.

21. A system for determining the status of an article on which work is being performed comprising:

a data transfer device for entering data on the status of an article on which work is being performed;

a computer database for tabulating data entered in the data transfer device and transferred to said computer database;

software for identifying an article in said database and the corresponding data on the status of the article; and

means for transferring the corresponding data to a remote location.

22. The system of claim 21, wherein said data transfer device is portable.

23. The system of claim 21, wherein the article is a vehicle undergoing repair.

24. The system of claim 23, wherein said status data includes information selected from the group consisting of: (i) cost estimate completed, (ii) repair authorized by owner, (iii) insurance approved, (iv) parts ordered, (v) parts received, (vi) vehicle scheduled

for repair, (vii) vehicle disassembled, (viii) supplemental damage report written, (ix) repair of supplemental damage approved by insurance, (x) additional parts ordered, (xi) vehicle set up on repair equipment, (xii) structure and body repaired, (xiii) panels installed, (xiv) corrosion protection applied, (xv) metal work completed, (xvi) vehicle primed for painting, (xvii) vehicle painted, (xviii) vehicle cleaned, (xix) vehicle refinished, and (xx) repair completed.

25. The system of claim 24, wherein the status data includes a vehicle identifier.

26. The system of claim 25, wherein the identifier is a repair order number, a Vehicle Identification Number, or a bar code.

27. The system of claim 21, wherein said means for transferring the corresponding data is a computer network.

28. A system of determining the status of an article on which work is being performed comprising:

- (1) means for electronically transferring data on the status of an article to a computer database;
- (2) means for searching the computer database to locate the article; and
- (3) means for identifying the data on the status of the article.

29. The system of claim 28, wherein the article is a vehicle undergoing repair.

30. The system of claim 29, wherein means (3) further comprises means for electronically transferring the identified data to a remote location.

31. The system of claim 30 further comprising (4) means for electronically requesting the status of the vehicle.

32. The system of claim 31 further comprising a computer network having means (2), (3), and (4).

33. The system of claim 29, wherein the second database stores an identifier for the vehicle and means (2) comprises a means for searching for the identifier of the vehicle.

34. The system of claim 33, wherein the identifier is a repair order number, a Vehicle Identification Number, or a bar code.

35. The system of claim 29, wherein means (1) further comprises means for electronically transferring the data from a remote location to the computer database.

36. The system of claim 35, wherein means (1) comprises a data transfer device into which the data on the vehicle status has been entered.

37. The system of claim 36, wherein said data transfer device is portable.

38. The system of claim 29, wherein the status data includes information selected from the group consisting of: (i) cost estimate completed, (ii) repair authorized by owner, (iii) insurance approved, (iv) parts ordered, (v) parts received, (vi) vehicle scheduled

for repair, (vii) vehicle disassembled, (viii) supplemental damage report written, (ix) repair of supplemental damage approved by insurance, (x) additional parts ordered, (xi) vehicle set up on repair equipment, (xii) structure and body repaired, (xiii) panels installed, (xiv) corrosion protection applied, (xv) metal work completed, (xvi) vehicle primed for painting, (xvii) vehicle painted, (xviii) vehicle cleaned, (xix) vehicle refinished, and (xx) repair completed.

39. The system of claim 38, wherein the vehicle undergoes repair steps which result in the status data of claim 38.

40. The system of claim 39, wherein the repair steps are performed in the order of the information of (i)-(xx) of claim 38.

41. The system of claim 39 in which means (3) comprises a means for the owner of the vehicle to access the database to determine the status of the vehicle following at least one of repair steps (v), (x), (xv), and (xx).

42. The system of claim 41, wherein the means for accessing the status of the vehicle is automatically employed.

43. A system of tracking the repair process of a vehicle that is in a repair shop comprising:

- (1) means for electronically transferring data on a periodic basis on the status of a plurality of vehicles undergoing repair to a database of a computer;
- (2) means for determining the length of time that the status data for each vehicle remains unchanged via software on the computer; and

- (3) means for identifying a vehicle for which the status data is unchanged beyond a predetermined length of time and identifying the unchanged status data.

44. The system of claim 43, wherein the status data is transferred daily.

45. The system of claim 43, wherein the status data of step (1) is selected from the group consisting of: (i) cost estimate completed, (ii) repair authorized by owner, (iii) insurance approved, (iv) parts ordered, (v) parts received, (vi) vehicle scheduled for repair, (vii) vehicle disassembled, (viii) supplemental damage report written, (ix) repair of supplemental damage approved by insurance, (x) additional parts ordered, (xi) vehicle set up on repair equipment, (xii) structure and body repaired, (xiii) panels installed, (xiv) corrosion protection applied, (xv) metal work completed, (xvi) vehicle primed for painting, (xvii) vehicle painted, (xviii) vehicle cleaned, (xix) vehicle refinished, and (xx) repair completed.

46. The system of claim 43, wherein means (1) is a portable data transfer device into which status data is entered and transferred to the database.

47. The system of claim 43, wherein the database stores an identifier for each vehicle, the identifier being selected from the group consisting of vehicle make, vehicle model, and vehicle year such that the software determines the extent that the status data for each identifier remains unchanged beyond a predetermined length of time.